



# Gourd Lanterns

Written By: Diane Gilleland



## TOOLS:

- [Drill \(1\)](#)
- [Paring knife \(1\)](#)
- [Pumpkin-carving tools \(1\)](#)  
*like those found here:*  
<http://www.yankeeharvest.com/>
- [Spoon \(1\)](#)



## PARTS:

- [Water \(1\)](#)
- [Hard-shell gourd \(1\)](#)
- [Mineral oil \(1\)](#)
- [Newspaper \(1\)](#)
- [Pencil \(1\)](#)
- [Sponge \(1\)](#)
- [Christmas lights \(1 string\)](#)
- [Surgical mask \(1\)](#)
- [Bucket \(1\)](#)

## SUMMARY

Hard-shell gourds, sometimes called calabash gourds, are some of the world's first cultivated plants. They are harvested from their vines in the fall and then air-dried for several months. When a gourd is fully dry inside and out, it forms a woody shell that can be cut with simple tools.

Cultures all over the world fashion hard-shell gourds into vessels or musical instruments. Here, we've turned them into festive outdoor lanterns, using a drill to create patterns for light to shine through.

NOTE: This project is fairly messy, making it a good outdoor build.

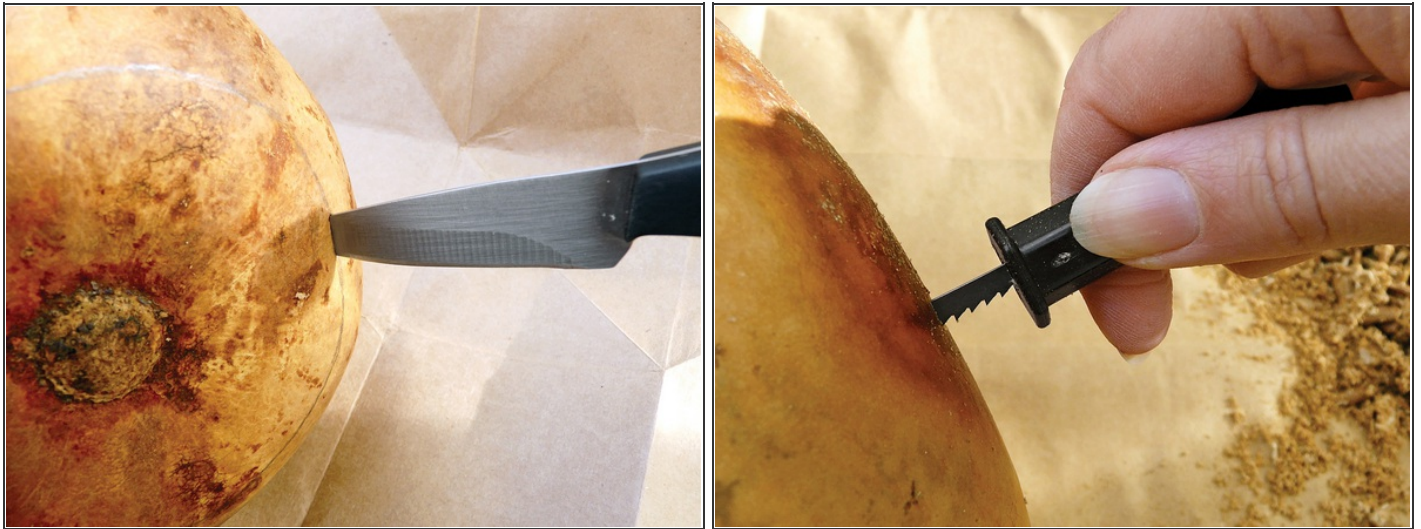
### Step 1 — Clean the gourd.



- Hard-shell gourds develop a coating of dirt and mold as they dry out. You can buy them already cleaned, but you'll save a lot of money by cleaning them yourself. Begin by soaking the gourd in a bucket of water for about 10 minutes. The gourd will want to float, so turn it occasionally to keep all sides wet.
- Then, use a scrubbing sponge to remove the grime. It should rub off with medium pressure. If you find an area that's difficult to scrub clean, try letting it soak a bit longer. If your gourd has a stem, you can scrub the grime from it as well. Allow the gourd to air-dry.
- NOTE: The gourd will have some natural discoloration even after cleaning.



## Step 2 — Cut off the base.



- Cover your work surface with paper. Use a pencil to draw about a 6" circle around the bottom of the gourd. When you cut out this circle, it will give the gourd a flat, stable base to sit on. Begin the cut by using a paring knife to poke a hole through the gourd shell. Use medium pressure and gently rock the blade back and forth until it penetrates the shell.
- Insert a pumpkin-carving saw into this cut and carefully saw along your pencil line. Use the part of the blade closest to the handle for sawing; this will keep the blade from bending.
- NOTE: Some people are allergic to gourd dust, so do this next step outdoors and wear a surgical mask if you have this sensitivity.



### Step 3 — Clean out the inside.



- Remove the base of the gourd and dump all the loose seeds and dried pulp from inside it. Gourds vary widely; some will have very little material on the inner walls and others will have a thick layer of flaky dried pulp. If the material is thick, scrape out as much as you can with a large spoon.
- Discard the pulp and seeds.

### Step 4 — Draw some guidelines.


- Draw a design on the gourd in pencil. You can trace a template or draw freehand. These lines will serve as cutting guides and can be easily removed with an eraser later.



## Step 5 — Drill or cut out your design.



- You can always cut a design into the gourd using the pumpkin carving saw, but I've decided to use a drill here. With a drill, you can build all kinds of patterns from holes of various sizes. Position the drill bit so it's perpendicular to the gourd's surface, and drill straight into the gourd with medium pressure. The drilled holes should be at least 1/4" apart to keep the surface of the gourd from breaking. Vary your patterns by switching to drill bits of different sizes.

- **CAUTION:** Be very careful when drilling a gourd, as the  drill bit can slide on the curved surface and cause injury. Always steady the gourd against your work surface, and keep your hands far away from the bit. Be especially careful when drilling scarred areas of the shell, as they can be much harder than the surrounding shell and can cause the bit to slip.

## Step 6 — Clean up your design.



- When you've finished drilling your pattern into the gourd, clean your pencil lines off the shell with an eraser.
- Inspect the gourd from the inside. That pulpy material on the walls sometimes clogs up the drilled holes. Poke the holes from the inside with a pencil or bamboo skewer to clear them.

## Step 7 — Finish your gourd.

- You can leave your gourd unfinished, or rub a little mineral oil into the surface with a soft cloth. The oil will give the gourd a subtle shine and help it resist moisture.
- Alternatively, you can use a polyurethane spray varnish for maximum protection, but to my mind, it looks rather unnatural.

### Step 8 — Light it up.



- First and foremost, never place a lit candle inside a gourd lantern! The inside walls are highly flammable. Instead, stuff a string of tiny Christmas lights inside the gourd — they won't fall out — or use a small LED lantern.

This project first appeared in [MAKE VOLUME 21](#), page 130.

This document was last generated on 2012-11-14 10:53:25 PM.